NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

DESERT STORM
The War The Coalition Almost Lost

by

Robert R. Sterling Jr.

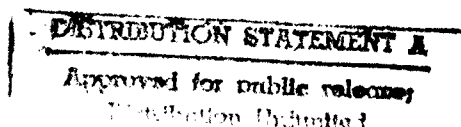LCDR   USN

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College
in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department
of Joint Maritime Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views
and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or
the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

22 February 1993

93 5 11 14 2

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION	1b RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS
UNCLASSIFIED	

2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY	3 DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT
	DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A; APPROVED FOR
2b DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE	PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.

4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	5 MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)

6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION	6b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	7a NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION
OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT	C	

6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)
NAVAL WAR COLLEGE NEWPORT, R.I. 02841	

8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER

8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS			
	PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO	TASK NO	WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO

11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)

DESERT STORM: THE WAR THE COALITION ALMOST LOST (U)

12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)   LCDR Robert R. Sterling, Jr., USN

13a. TYPE OF REPORT	13b. TIME COVERED	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day)	15 PAGE COUNT
FINAL	FROM _____ TO _____	22 Feb 1993	29

16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

17.	COSATI CODES		18 SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	Coalition; Limited War; Execution

19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)

This paper examines problems of war termination faced by the coalition members during the Persian Gulf War. By analyzing the differences in motivation between the U.S. and the Arab members joining the coalition during the Persian Gulf War, and by examining the different expectation of war termination, it is evident that a clear consensus between the major coalition forces was not present. The paper will discuss the theory of war termination, the war termination goals of the coalition members in the Persian Gulf War, and how the execution of the war with a U.S. view of war termination threatened the coalition. Finally, the importance of clear understanding and accord between members of coalition forces is defined, with conclusion and recommendation that the U.S. take a less self-centered approach to war termination when fighting within a coalition.

20 DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT	21 ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
☒ UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED ☐ SAME AS RPT ☐ DTIC USERS	unclassified

22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL	22b TELEPHONE (Include Area Code)	22c OFFICE SYMBOL
CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT	841-3414	C

DD FORM 1473, 84 MAR   83 APR edition may be used until exhausted   SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE
All other editions are obsolete
☆ U.S. Government Printing Office 1988—830-012

0102-LF-014-6602

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PREFACE

I spent Desert Shield initially assuring my relatives that I would not be going to the Gulf. Soon thereafter I transformed into the Perry Smith and Harry Summers of the Sterling and Stoskopf families. As I discovered, there were some problems being the family military advisor, there was no hour too late to call with queries encompassing the full range of "hawk to dove" emotion. The questions ranged from, "Isn't this just going to be another Vietnam?" to "Why should we trade our blood for their oil?". As Christmas approached, the questions stopped and the battle lines had been drawn in each family member's mind. "This is Bush's War for oil and big business." "I'm proud of our boys over there but can't we get them home for Christmas?" Everyone saw Desert Shield ending peacefully with Saddam Hussein pulling out of Kuwait, after all that was what any rational person would do. At least the telephone quit ringing so much. Then the Storm broke and the telephones started ringing again.

As I sat in front of the T.V. watching kids I had trained, friends, and neighbors fighting the war, I was secretly wishing I could be with them. At least I would no longer have to be the family military advisor, it was getting tiresome. The family was taking the War more seriously. They

had the audacity to compare my answers to their questions with what the network military advisors were putting out and then they requiring me to defend my position.

But the focus of the questions was different. The country was at war and the positions my relatives held were more support of the effort in the Gulf as long as there were a quick solution. When the ground war started the entire Sterling and Stoskopf clans held their breath and prayed. One hundred hours later we joined the country's cheering of a great victory.

Six months, a year, two years later the common theme of the questions I have to answer now is "What did we accomplish and was it worth it?" The same relatives who were against any military action at the start of Desert Shield now believe we should have driven all the way to Baghdad and ousted Saddam Hussein. I have a hard time convincing them we shouldn't have. What would have happened if we caused the down fall of Saddam Hussein?

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On the 27th of February 1991 when the XVIII and the VII
Corps had what remained of the Republican Guard sandwiched
around Basra the coalition forces had reached their
culminating point. Kuwait had been liberated and much of the
Iraqi war machine in the Kuwait Theater of Operations (KTO)
had been destroyed. But for the coalition forces to continue
in battle would have brought about their demise. The Iraqi
military was being routed wherever it was engaged but it was
the coalition that was in danger. Liddell Hart's admonition
comes most clearly to mind:

>If you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no
>thought for the after effect, you may be too
>exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost
>certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing
>the germs of another war. This is a lesson
>supported by abundant experience. The risks become
>greater still in any war that is waged by a
>coalition, or in such a case a too complete victory
>inevitably complicates the problem of making a just
>and wise peace settlement. Where there is no longer
>the counterbalance of an opposing force to control
>the appetites between the parties to the alliance.
>The divergence is then apt to become so acute as to
>turn the comradeship of common danger into the

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hostility of mutual dissatisfaction-so that the ally
of one war becomes the enemy in the next.[1]

My contention is that the U.S. operational planners in
Central Commands' (CENTCOM) staff failed to properly prepare
for the termination of hostilities. Specifically they did not
take into account the timing of the liberation of Kuwait and
offensive operations in Iraq against the Republican Guard.
The coalition could only allow offensive ground operations in
Iraqi territory against the Republican Guard as a means to
liberate Kuwait. Offensive ground operations in Iraq for the
sole purpose of the destruction of the Republican Guard was
contrary to the goals of the Arab members of the coalition and
possibly destablizing to their governments.

By examining the political limitations of the Arab
members of the coalition and comparing them to the planning
and execution of Desert Storm by CENTCOM, I will show that
U.S. operational level planners took a U.S. centric view of
the war and failed to account for the Arab forces on their
flanks.

CHAPTER II

THE AIMS AND FEARS OF THE COALITION

Building the Coalition forces and holding them together prior to the beginning of the final phase of Operation Desert Storm was a political highlight that matched the military success of the war. While building an ad hoc coalition of both western and Arab countries provides many benefits to the U.S. position in the Persian Gulf, it also requires the U.S. to accept a host of conditions or modifiers on how the war could be fought. In general, the western nations placed fewer constraints on the U.S. war effort than the Arab nations in the coalition. Each of the coalition members brought their own motivations as well as their own fears into the war with Iraq. The motivations and fears of the Arab nations played heavily into war and bare investigation.

Intervention by the major world powers in the events of the Persian Gulf has been a way of life since the discovery of oil in the region. The British played a heavy role in the post World War II environment of the Persian Gulf. As British colonialism faded, the struggle of the bi-polar imposed itself on the region. By accepting the support (usually military) of one of the super powers the Arab countries ended up being

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controlled by the super powers. To join forces with the
United States would almost automatically mean some measure of
control would be given up to the United States - something
that has grown increasing distasteful to the Arab world.

Where the U.S. intervenes, it feels impelled to bring a
little part of the U.S. with it. Much like religious
missionaries, the U.S. brings with it the word of democracy,
human rights, self determination, equal opportunity, and
religious freedom to the countries it is assisting. To the
Arab countries of the Gulf this hidden agenda was anathema.
Aligning themselves with a great military power to defeat
Iraqi aggression was one thing, subjecting themselves to
potentially threatening influences was another.[1] Another
conflict among Arab coalition members in cooperating with the
U.S. is that the U.S. is the major supporter of the enemy of
the Arab world, Israel.

Disrupting the Iraqi government was not acceptable to the
local Arab and Muslim leadership. Following the Iran-Iraq war
there was a major up rising of the Kurdish population in
northern Iraq that was harshly put down by Saddam Hussein. If
Saddam Hussein's rule was sufficiently weakened or if he was
overthrown in a war, the Kurds may be encouraged to revolt.
With the large numbers of Kurds in both Turkey and Iran a

Kurdish revolt in Iraq may spread outside Iraqi boarders. An uprising of the Shiites in southern Iraq could be far more devastating to the region. The Shiites and their Islamic fundamentalism coul' seriously threaten all of the moderate Islamic states. It was feared their fundamentalism could spread all the way to Egypt. The invasion of Kuwait was a far off threat when compared to the possibility internal ethnic strife. The Arab members of the coalition, including Saudi Arabia, wanted the Sunni's to remain in control of Iraq.[2] In fact after the war there were uprisings by both the Kurds and the Shias.

There was an addition fear that the destruction of the Republican Guard, the strong arm of Saddam Hussein and the Baath party, would bring about a power vacuum in Iraq. With the Baath party defeated and the Sunni's removed from power there would be a possibility for another Lebanon where constant fighting within Iraq by the Kurd and the Shiites for control of what remained of the country would invite further intervention by the major world powers.[3] If the major world powers did not intervene in a ruined Iraq it is very possible that oil poor Syria could find the prospect too inviting to pass up. Syria does have a history of attempting to restore peace to a country (Lebanon) by occupying it. Iran too would

be looking at the oil reserves of the enemy they fought for ten years.[4]

The Coalition of western and Arab states that formed to oppose Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait all agreed that Kuwait must be liberated and Iraqi aggression had to be checked. The question was how would this be done and to what extent would Saddam Hussein's powerful army be pruned. The U.S. and western members of the coalition were generally more willing to see Saddam Hussein and his government removed from power either by direct action (a casualty of the war), or indirectly (by destruction of the Republican Guard followed by Saddam Hussein being overthrown by a popular uprising).[5] Arab leaders had reason to fear such a complete defeat of Iraq. To be a party to the destruction of a fellow Arab nation was unthinkable, although Saddam Hussein's expansionism needed to be curbed.

To provide some separation from U.S. control the Arab nations in the coalition were not placed under CENTCOM's command. Instead there were two parallel chains of command, the western members of the coalition were formed under General Schwarzkopf's command (although the French maintained national control until the beginning of the ground war) and the Arab members of the coalition were formed under Lieutenant General

Khalid, the senior Saudi commander.[6] There was not a unity of command and unity of effort with such diversity and mistrust between the members of the coalition was questionable.

CHAPTER III

PLANNING A LIMITED WAR

A macro overview of limited warfare will be useful for a
more detailed discussion of what happened in the Persian Gulf.
None of these ideas are revolutionary but they play an
important role in the coalition's planning.

Initial planning for any conflict must have a clear
vision of the end state. This vision is the target for the
conflict, all productive efforts will be focused on the
target. A set of clear political objectives should be derived
to focus the diplomatic, economic, informational and military
efforts to allow that vision to become a reality. Military
objectives should then be drafted to enable those political
objectives.[1] This is true with any level of conflict and is
just a statement of the relationship of the political
leadership to the military commander, in the United States it
is the National Command Authority (NCA) relationship to the
unified commander.

On the operation level the campaign should be planned to
not only meet the military objectives but plan for war
termination. Although simplistic, it is useful to state that
wars end because one side is either physically unable to

continue fighting or because one side is no longer willing to make the effort required to continue (the cost is too high).[2] During the battle for the Falkland Islands the Argentine planners clearly met the military objectives that gave the Argentine government their vision of an Argentine flag flying over the Falklands. But equally as clear the Argentine planners fail to plan for war termination. The British were physically able to fight and were willing to make the effort.

Planning for limited warfare presents some difficult problems not found in unlimited warfare. In limited warfare the political environment has more importance than the military objectives. The military commander must always check his actions to see if they meet the current political environment, for while military objectives may change over the course of a campaign, political environment may change much more rapidly. During unlimited warfare, the political environment remains relatively constant through out the conflict. Unlimited wars normally end when the military objectives are achieved; while in a limited war some of the issues that led to war may not be solved by simply meeting the military objective. Successful termination of the conflict must be solved by other means, usually political or diplomatic.[3]

CHAPTER IV

DESERT STORM PLANNING

Once enough combat power had been built up in Saudi
Arabia to not only deter any further belligerence on the part
of Saddam Hussein but to forcibly remove him from Kuwait,
planning for Operation Desert Storm began in earnest. The
focus initially will be on the various levels of planning by
the U.S. and then as a counter point the focus will shift to
the Arab members of the coalition.

THE U.S. POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

Shortly after U.S. troops started to arrive in Saudi
Arabia, President Bush published his national policy
objectives for Operation Desert Shield:

-Immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of all
Iraqi forces from Kuwait;

-Restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government;

-Security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian
Gulf.[1]

The President's complete vision for the region is not apparent

from these four simple bullets. By examining his actions the President's implied vision may become clearer.

The President worked very hard at building a consensus of world opinion against Saddam Hussein and supportive of the U.S. position. By building a broad based coalition of both Arab and western nations, the President diverted Saddam Hussein's call for pan-Arab support and his claim to be the leader of Arab world. Through the United Nations, the President secured numerous Security Counsel Resolutions condemning Saddam Hussein's invasion into Kuwait and gaining the backing of international law for the required military action to remove Iraqi troops from Kuwait. With the consensus building the President was also working to create a new wave of cooperation and understanding between the U.S. and its Arab coalition partners.

As a result of working through the U.N. and the coalition, the President did not have the same freedom of action that he would of had if the U.S. had acted unilaterally. The U.N. Security Counsel Resolutions definitely prevented an unlimited war against Iraq, instead focusing on the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and the threat Iraq presented to the region.[2]

THE U.S. MILITARY OBJECTIVES

General Schwarzkopf developed his military objectives for Operation Desert Storm based of the guidance he receive during Desert Shield, they were:

-Attack Iraqi political-military leadership and command and control (C2);

-Gain and maintain air superiority;

-Sever Iraqi supply lines;

-Destroy known nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) production, storage and delivery capabilities;

-Destroy Republican Guard forces in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations (KTO); and

-Liberate Kuwait City.[3]

To further focus his operational planners, General Schwarzkopf presented his Commander's Intent:

-Maximize friendly strength against Iraqi weakness and terminate offensive operations with the [Republican Guard] destroyed and major U.S. forces controlling critical lines of communication in the KTO.[4]

Each level has more completely defined the vision of the previous level. The President had an implied vision of a consensus of world opinion against Iraq and backing the coalition, and at the end of the conflict there would be a new wave of U.S. and Arab cooperation and understanding. The political objectives derived from that vision were to eject the Iraqis from Kuwait and provide for the security of the Persian Gulf. The military planning built on those political objectives. General Schwarzkopf provided his vision of the outcome of the operation; the Republican Guards having been destroyed and coalition forces in control of the KTO.

THE ARAB COALITION VIEW

On the Arab side of the coalition their vision was just slightly different from the U.S.'s vision. The liberation of Kuwait was primary and the destruction of Iraqi forces would only be undertaken as a means to liberate Kuwait. The preferred method of liberating Kuwait was to go directly from Saudi Arabia to Kuwait without encroaching on Iraqi territory. President Bush was able to obtain agreement on the proposed envelopment of the Republican Guard forces only by promising an immediate withdrawal from Iraq once Kuwait was liberated.[5]

The difference in the U.S. and Arab visions was

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significant. The Arab vision had the Iraqi army occupying Kuwait as the primary military target, the Republican Guard units along the boarder would be allowed to survive largely in tact. The Republican Guard would ensure the stability of the Baath party and Saddam Hussein's grip on the country, the defeat of his army in Kuwait would curb his ability to militarily coerce the region.

CHAPTER V

DESERT STORM EXECUTION

The execution of Desert Storm was divided into four
phases, the first three phases were carried out by coalition
aircraft against strategic and C2 targets as well as
battlefield preparation. These missions went smoothly with
the exception of the attempted destruction of NBC targets and
their possible delivery platforms. The only way coalition
forces could be assured of neutralizing this capability is to
occupy the country and perform a detailed search and that was
impossible with the limited nature of the war.[1]

The last phase, the ground phase of the operation began
on the 24th of February. Although this phase carried the
biggest risk it was obvious within the first 24 hours that the
Iraqi Army was completely unprepared to counter the coalition
offensive. The highly regarded Republican Guard was faring
little better. Of the five Republican Guard divisions in the
KTO, three divisions had been destroyed by the 27th of
February and the U.S. forces had the Hammurabi heavy division
in its sights. The rout was in full swing. The only thing to
slow the offensive was stopping to pick up enemy prisoners.[2]

The Iraqi troops fleeing Kuwait were being subjected to

extremely severe air attacks. The highway was littered with tanks, armored personnel carriers, trucks, and civilian cars. The road from Kuwait City to Basra was a visible reminder of the violence of modern warfare.[3]

It was on the 27th of February that General Schwarzkopf gave his briefing to the press that became known as "The Mother of All Briefings". At that point, 29 Iraqi divisions had been destroyed; approximately 3700 tanks had been destroyed or captured; and the number of enemy prisoners was in excess of 50,000. The Iraqis were trapped in the KTO and were being destroyed in detail. Kuwait City was being secured by the U.S. Marines.[4]

Alarm bells must have been going off in the heads of the Arab members of the coalition. Although they had to be ecstatic with the success of the coalition over Saddam Hussein's military might, their very real fears about the post war picture were about to come true. Kuwait was all but liberated and the U.S. miliary was not satisfied. The U.S. military was still trying to completely destroy the Republican Guard, the very force that kept Saddam Hussein in power. There must have been some frantic communication with the White House that evening because the next day the President ordered a unilateral cease-fire. That cease-fire in effect let the

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few remaining Republican Guard units to melt across the Euphrates River.[5]

CENTCOM was fully prepared to continue its offensive against the Republican Guard, even after the liberation of Kuwait. At the operational level the CENTCOM staff did not appreciate the sensitivities of their coalition allies, their U.S. centric vision of the war's outcome failed to see the long range implications of a detailed defeat of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard. The Republican Guard ensured continued survival of the Baath party and the regional stability both in Iraq and by extension stability throughout the Gulf.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

To say the CENTCOM operational planning staff did not plan for war termination would be faulty. Their vision was the Iraqi Army forcefully ejected from Kuwait and the Republican Guard defeated and demoralized. Kuwait would be free and secure, the Persian Gulf states would not have to fear Iraqi incursions into their countries for many years, and Saddam Hussein's control over his country would be in question. The staff realized that they were fighting a limited war and many of their military objectives might be unobtainable without the occupation of Iraq. Complete destruction of Iraq's NBC capability could not be assured without inspections of facilities throughout Iraq. That job would have to be left up to the U.N. following the war.

On the operational level, the CENTCOM staff failed to comprehend that the tentative agreement of the Arab members of the coalition to the proposed "left hook" envelopment of the Iraqi Republican Guard was only as a means to liberate Kuwait and not that the Republican Guard was a military target in its own right. If General Schwarzkopf wanted to engage the Republican Guard as the primary military target despite the

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differences of his Arab allies, his staff should have realized that once Kuwait was liberated their mandate for offensive operations against the Republican Guard in Iraq would expire. With Kuwait liberated, the Arab nations would become increasingly sensitive to any further offensive operations. In the Arab mind the specter of U.S. opportunism, or imperialism, increased with continued military action.

The Arab fears of the destabilization of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein may have been more imagined than fact. Saddam Hussein has proved to be surprisingly resilient; having faced a ten year war with the Iranians, ethnic strife, and a bankrupt economy, he still maintains an iron grip over his oppressed country.

Whether or not Saddam Hussein remains in power, the flaw of the CENTCOM planning is evident. The only military objectives CENTCOM considered were their own. In my opinion, if the western members had continued offensive operations for even another 24 hours it would have put an extreme strain on the Arab members of the coalition. The Arab members' only recourse to the continued fighting would have been a public announcement of their withdrawal from the coalition. With the split of the coalition, the post war tensions between the coalition members would have destroyed what ever detente

those members had established.

President Bush spent a great deal of effort to build this coalition and hold it together during the six months prior to Desert Storm. During the initial phases of the air war, President Bush ensured the coalition was not threatened when Iraqi Scuds attacked Israel. By placating the Israelis into temporarily suspending their near constant policy of retribution for any attack against Israel, President Bush ensured that the Arab members did not have to decide between countering Iraqi aggression or coming to the aid of a fellow Arab being attacked by Israel. The enormity of the effort President Bush devoted to holding the coalition together spoke volumes of his vision of a new level of cooperation between the U.S. and the Arab nations of the Persian Gulf following the war. Continuing the military offensive against Iraq after the liberation of Kuwait endangered this vision. We would have won the war but lost the peace.

As we draw down to the Base Force, we are going to spend more time fighting as a member of a coalition. Future commanders are going to have to take a less U.S. centric position and be sure to include the post conflict vision of their allies in their military planning.

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